

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry

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The Honorable Edward P. Boland  
Chairman  
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

At the hearing of your Committee on 16 June 1983, there was a question from you about Sandinista military strength. I believe that you had the impression that we had come up with new information about this strength. In December 1982 we furnished your Committee a Special National Intelligence Estimate entitled "Prospects for Escalating Hostilities Between Nicaragua and Honduras." There has been no change in this Estimate.

The Sandinista military has an active duty strength of about 25,000, including mobilized reservists and militiamen. The Intelligence Community is in agreement on this figure. The number of Sandinista troops on active duty probably continues to increase, and we periodically will reassess the figure.

We are less certain of the total strength of the reserves and militia, but we estimate the total of these forces is between 60,000 - 80,000. The Sandinistas have claimed numbers as large as 120,000, but this probably includes many who are not in organized units and have received little or no training.

As early as December 1982, the Intelligence Community estimated that some 10,000 - 12,000 of the active duty personnel were deployed in the north opposite Honduras. At that time, we estimated active duty strength at 21,000 and total reserve and militia at over 40,000, but we cautioned that these numbers are growing. Since then, we have continued to report the mobilization of more militia and reservists to fight the insurgents, as well as the deployment of more armor and artillery units to the Honduran border.

Across the border from the Las Trojes area of Honduras, where the two journalists were killed on 21 June, the Sandinistas have some three to four thousand troops in the Jalapa Valley. These are organized in six or seven battalions, and they are probably a mixture of regular troops, reservists, and militia, with such weapons as mortars, machine guns, and grenade launchers. Sandinista artillery is deployed north of the town of Jalapa.

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Concerning the total capabilities of the Honduran and Nicaraguan forces on the ground, the Sandinistas have a clear advantage in numbers and in weapons, with tanks, armored personnel carriers, howitzers, and rocket launchers, although they are inferior to the Hondurans in the air. The Hondurans have 11 Super Mystere aircraft and 11 A-37 attack aircraft. You are aware from our briefing of your Committee that MIG-21 aircraft assigned to Nicaagua are in Cuba at this time. If these were brought into the picture, the Sandinistas would have a clear advantage over the Hondurans.

Sincerely,

*WJ Casey*  
**WJ Casey**

William J. Casey  
Director of Central Intelligence

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